

# INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOISE DUFOUR<sup>1</sup>

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

Maycon Silva AGUIAR<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **N. M. S. A.:** I would like to Françoise Dufour, whom was truly kind to me at all the messages shared, for this interview. I would like too to thank Tania Conceição Clemente de Souza, Rosane da Conceição Pereira, Cláudio de A. Pádua, Rodrigo Pereira da Silva Rosa e Yasmin Tavares de Souza for their valuable opinions.

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Françoise Dufour, graduated Engineer, was a freelance expert working in development projects funded by UNPD, EC, UNWTO, when she decided to regain her love for languages, and restarted her studies in Linguistics.

She has obtained her PhD with a thesis on the connection between development discourse and colonial ideology.

In this interview to our editor Maycon Silva Aguiar, she tell us a bit of her professional trajectory, her researches, and addresses to questions concerning colonial discourse, racism, unscientific speeches, migrants and refugees, besides commenting on Discourse Analysis, and the path this discipline is currently pursuing, where it finds itself, and where it is going to.

**1. M. S. A.** *You have established yourself as an independent researcher in the high French centers of knowledge production and have become known as such. What are the advantages and disadvantages of not joining a knowledge production center? What factor led you to an independent research career? In the decision to become an independent researcher, is there any political influence?*

**F. D.** It's a difficult question but thank you for asking and I am happy to hear that I am known as an independent researcher even in Brazil!

I got my PhD very late (2007 when I was already 55). I had a professional life before restarting university courses in Linguistics. I worked as a freelance expert in development projects funded by UNDP, EC, WTO<sup>3</sup> in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also in Mongolia, Armenia, the Crimea, Palestine... My field of

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<sup>3</sup> **N. F. D.:** UNDP, EC, WTO: respectively United Nations Development program (New York), European Commission (Brussels), World Tourism Organization (Madrid).

expertise was tourism development but I also worked in handicraft, fashion, food and beverages. I was very critical regarding the kind of assistance these international organizations were providing (paid out of the budgetary line of development, but benefitting to the consulting firms and consortiums). I was particularly concerned about the dominance established via discourses and interactions with the countries “assisted” that put them in a low position.

That’s why in my free time I went to follow Linguistic courses at the University of Montpellier 3. I had no ambition to become a researcher at the time. I was motivated to understand the discomfort I encountered during my field missions, that’s why I made dissertations on the topic of colonial and postcolonial domination in discourses on Africa around Mali. In 2002 I decided to stop my professional activity and to invest myself totally in research while teaching discourse analysis.

Age has been an obstacle to academic recruitment, as was the overly transdisciplinary nature of my thesis, which did not fall clearly enough within the disciplinary field of pure linguistics, or that of the other social sciences dealing with (post) colonial issues. Consequently, I had to work in other research projects for sustaining my living. I worked on topics such as sensoriality or academic research. But I have always been known for my works on coloniality. Even if I have been employed as a researcher only on other topics I keep researching on that topic and I am often asked to give conferences on it.

In the different projects I have been involved I have experienced being part of research labs in France (what you call knowledge production centers) and a research team in the UK. It has been very fruitful for me to move from one to another and it has contributed to enlarge my knowledge and experience.



As a independent researcher (freelancer) I now sign my papers under the name of La Langagière (<http://la-langagiere.net>). I am more free in the choice of my research topics than the affiliated researchers who increasingly need to request funds from national or international research agencies to finance their research projects.

**M. S. A.** Questions 2 to 7 sometimes refer to politics' constitution in various areas. In proposing them, I thought of receiving answers that combined her researcher's opinion with the theoretical basis of Discourse Analysis. In your opinion, as a researcher, I refer to your experience with the topics covered; and by the theoretical basis of Discourse Analysis, I see to treating the questions as research subjects and offering them appropriate theoretical treatment.

2. **M. S. A.** *In one of your books, De l'idéologie coloniale à celle du développement. Une analyse du discours France-Afrique (L'HARMATTAN, 2010) a profound analysis of the colonial relations between France and Africa is made. For Brazil, the period lived as a Portuguese colony generated, as inheritance, high rates of income concentration and marginalization, as far as public policies are concerned, both native peoples of the territory (indigenous communities) and descendants of the African peoples trafficked for here. Today, despite some talk and action in Brazil to some extent to reduce social inequalities, in recent years, especially with the election of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, the number of extremist speeches denying consequences of colonial exploitation*



*and slavery for the formation of Brazilian society, portraying the colonization process in an optimistic and fallacious way. In your opinion, is the use of unscientific discourse<sup>4</sup> as a political strategy associated with the growth of the conservative agenda around the world? To what extent does the growth of the talking agenda depend on rewriting the historical facts?*

**F. D.** Undoubtedly the positive representation of colonization's effects for the colonized populations has always been used as a way to give some credits to colonization by focusing on tangible facts such as construction in the colonies of infrastructures: schools, hospitals, roads, etc.

Trying to give ex-post some positive aspects of colonization, it has been the case with the law of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2005 voted at the French Parliament under the mandate of the right-wing president Jacques Chirac. There was a passage in the law (art. 4) enjoining teachers to present a positive assessment of colonization: "School curricula recognize in particular the positive role of the French presence overseas, especially in North Africa" in which "colonization" has been euphemized in "French presence overseas". The sentence has been deleted the following year after intense debate and contestation in Algeria and from French leftist parties and associations. A number of historians believed that the wording of article 4 contradicted

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<sup>4</sup> **N. M. S. A.:** To answer these questions, please be aware that I refer, by 'unscientific speeches', to the reproduction of discourses that have been known and acknowledged by scientific investigations as unfounded. An excellent example of this is the resumption of speeches in favor of the flat-earth theory today, although this theory has no scientific basis. Therefore, unscientific discourse is one that scorns the contribution of scientific investigations in the construction of a particular argument.



historical reality and could be interpreted as an attempt to deny all that the colonization had harmful and violent for the populations.

Reinterpreting historical facts and manipulating data are common practices in extreme-right populist speeches.

**3· M. S. A.** *In the articles “La stéréotypie comme processus de dominance dans les discours sur le Mali: des discours coloniaux aux discours du développement” and “Catégorisation, stéréotypie et dialogisme: la nomination comme expression de points de vue”, stereotypes are considered as a strategy of social domination. Can the use of unscientific discourse<sup>5</sup> as a political strategy be taken as a form of stereotyping?*

**F. D.** I would not say that stereotyping is a “strategy” of social domination, but that stereotyping acts as such, i.e. it produces social domination. In my works on stereotypes, I have shown how colonial discursive stereotypes have been reformulated in the development Discourse: from colonial names as *barbarians, savages, primitives* (with related characteristics of ignorance, laziness, insouciance etc.) to *under-developed, less-advanced*. This production of binary categories: *underdeveloped vs developed, advanced vs less-advanced* are to be analyzed in the framework of the dominant ideology of Progress. In this case, it is not strictly speaking an unscientific discourse that serves as a political argument for dominance but the belief that growth, wealth,

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<sup>5</sup> **N. F. D.:** See note 1.

Reason, scientific knowledge etc. are indicators for something called “development”. If an endless Progress is considered as the norm according to a set of criteria defined by the dominants, societies not responding to that criteria are stereotyped and enjoined to conform to that norm. Of course, nations that are at the top of the ladder benefit from the situation because they can provide assistance and keep control on the assisted.

But unscientific speech is often used to validate stereotypes of certain categories of people, especially in the context of elections. For example, the extreme-right candidate to the French presidential elections Marine Le Pen regularly stigmatize Muslims for gaining more votes, but she does so indirectly by manipulating information that has not been verified. For instance, in 2012, she had asserted that all the meat distributed in Ile-de-France<sup>6</sup> were, without the knowledge of consumers, “exclusively” halal meat. She based her assertion on a report from a television magazine entitled “Meat in all its states”, which demonstrated that more and more animals were slaughtered when conscious and no longer asleep. The submission to a religious food requirement based on fake news was argued as the warning sign of the importation of an exogenous culture in the French society. The reference to halal meat distributed to French people served as a metaphor for invasion and acculturation that were formulated implicitly.

Using unscientific discourse and fake news for influencing public opinion is certainly the breeding ground for stereotyping. But can the use of unscientific discourse as a political strategy be a form of stereotype?

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<sup>6</sup> The region around Paris.



It is worth investigating it more thoroughly and I would be interested if somebody does it. By the way it would be a good research project!

**4. M. S. A.** *Which speeches about former colonies are most often heard in French society? Can we say that, as in Brazil, French society has a purist tendency that clashes violently with its historical process of formation? For example, French society denies that historical process (entirely or in part), and its consequences?*

**F. D.** More than denying its historical process of formation, the French society ignores this part of its history. Discourses are focused on immigration without linking this phenomenon to colonization. It is a sort of unthought. Most of the second and third generations of North- and Sub-Saharan-Africans who were born in France and have the French nationality are not treated fairly compared to so called “truly French” and still often suffer from discrimination (police controls, discrimination in hiring etc.). “The diversity” is a circulating formula in discourses calling for more descendants from immigrants in the medias, in the political sphere etc. This denomination “diversity” that does not include all strata of society but only the minorities would be worth analyzing in discourse analysis because it carries in itself what the decolonial movement calls the “colonial difference”. I refer to the notions of “coloniality of power” and the “colonial difference” coined by the Latin-American researchers Anibal Quijano and Enrique Dussel who conceive them as loci of enunciation: there is a section of human history silenced by discourses on modernity and western civilization.





5. **M. S. A.** *Is the French administration responsible for monitoring the development of former colonies as a means of providing them with social justice, as it has been partly responsible for their current social situation?*

**F. D.** My personal opinion is negative. Former colonies have gained their independence and colonization is part of their historical past. They are now independent states which are able and claim to decide freely for their destiny. The only part French administration should deal with is the debt cancellation, that is not fair to be claimed.

Assistance to development is a way to keep maintaining dependency and dominance, as I have shown in my book (*De l'idéologie coloniale à celle du développement*, 2010). Dominance is at stake when former colonial nations interfere in the governance of free independent states. Monitoring former colonies' development means first considering that they cannot control their own social situation; secondly, interfering in their own business; thirdly tracing their destiny by means of the dominant values of the "Global North".

6. **M. S. A.** *Regarding the relations between colony and colonizer, do you feel comfortable enough to draw parallels between the colonization processes in Africa and Brazil?*

**F. D.** Each colonial discourse is specific because the historical and cultural contexts are different. Nevertheless, coloniality from its beginnings is a "world system" in the "capitalist world economy" as a system (WALLERSTEIN,



1974). Consequently, we can analyze coloniality and the relationships between colony and colonizer from a comparative perspective as well as from a transversal one. Same links could be established between colonial power and cultural hegemony and correlatively between political resistance and knowledge emancipation, with a view to “O fim do império cognitivo” (The end of the cognitive empire) (SOUSA SANTOS, 2011).

Whatever the type of coloniality of power exerted in the different European colonial Empires (Belgian, British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Spanish etc.), there were comparable dominant discourses on civilization and modernity that reduced to silence other voices considered as inferior.

As I am not a specialist of the colonization of Brazil, if I had to “draw parallels between colonization processes in Africa and Brazil”, from a discourse analyst perspective, I would compare the two discursive formations. French and Portuguese colonial systems were both patriarchal. The concept of “race” has been one of the categories at the foundation of the colonial system in articulation with the one of social class: “social classes have a color” wrote H. Quijano (2000).

Cultural hegemony was and is still a shared mainspring of imperialism. As the Martiniquan poet and essayist Aimé Césaire wrote: “the colonial order it is through cultural disorder that it occurs” (1959). “Cultural coloniality” (Dussel), which is common to most processes of (post)colonial domination, has been and is still established at the expense of indigenous cultures.

7 · **M. S. A.** *The issue of immigration is another theme of social relevance that appears represented in your academic production. In a recent article, this topic is approached from a perspective*



that includes the concept of national identity. In recent times, the analysis of immigration processes has had to consider the migratory movements of social refugee groups. As the idea of national identity runs through the constitution of social refugee groups — who are forced to leave their territory and find themselves in the condition of living in a territory in which they will be permanently *THE OTHER* —, and will be on the fringes of any notion of belonging? How is this issue of belonging treated by the French public politics?

**F. D.** France has experienced relatively stable immigration since the 1970s, contrary to the idea which underlies the concept of “migrant crisis” to which the extreme-right party contributed with blows of extraordinary figures: since 2005, the figures for immigration have been stable. Nevertheless, not only the extreme-right party but most of the political parties play the game of a migrant crisis: they stigmatize migrants and speak up for regulation of migration that is considered as a threat for the French society and culture. As I related in question 3 the protection of “French identity” associated with the issue of security is often invoked as a political argument.

*Migrants or refugees:* there has been a lively semantic debate to decide how to name people arriving on European coasts after crossing the Mediterranean at the risk of their lives. The term *migrants* resonated negatively, echoing immigration that has not a good reputation, especially because of its use for populist aims. All migrants are not considered as refugees who are by definition “obliged to move if they want to save their lives or preserve their freedom” according to the HCR. Obtaining a refugee



status with the grant of a resident card for ten years is an obstacle course. Economic migrants are not recognized as refugees, but refugees are also migrants. Hopefully there are NGOs in France working against all forms of discrimination and defending the rights of people running away from their home country, whether they are migrants, asylum seekers or refugees.

**8. M. S. A.** *In Brazil, Discourse Analysis is forced to justify its academic affiliation with linguistics, because those who claim to be linguists reject in their midst a discipline that relies on psychoanalysis and Marxist theory to study the human language. For these linguists, it is inconceivable that concepts such as ideology are applied to the study of the human language. How is the dialogue between Discourse Analysis and other areas in France interested in studying human language?*

**F. D.** Discourse Analysis, grounded in the works of Michel Foucault and Michel Pêcheux and his team, was in France historically attached to the discipline of Linguistics. Many other disciplines such as political science, history or sociology also practice discourse analysis, thanks to the use of text-processing methods that allow exploration of large corpora. They analyze the lexicon used, but not the linguistics markers like linguists do. There is now dialogue between disciplines or researchers using discourse analysis and an international field of “Discourse Studies” is emerging mainly across social sciences. But as far as I am concerned, I still wish my works to be related to discourse analysis.



9. **M. S. A.** *What is your latest job? Could you tell me a little about it? What have been your research interests?*

**F. D.** My latest job was in ERC (European Research Council) projects led by Professor Johannes Angermüller at the University of Warwick (UK). The DISCONEX project (“The Discursive Construction of Academic Excellence”) investigated the social practices of researchers, their knowledges and careers. The team has compared academic systems and cultures of research in the social sciences and humanities in France, Germany, the UK and the U.S., particularly in two fields with distinct knowledge traditions and institutional cultures: linguistics and sociology.

My own research was focused on the ins and outs of the visibility of researchers on the net, particularly the links between academic recognition and visibility injunction in the context of current academic ideology.

My current research interests are the effects of the transfer without translation of terms belonging to dominant cultural universes to others that have not the same cultural praxis. I call “discursive dominance” the use of linguistic markers and enunciative modalities that contribute to impose a dominant meaning and establish an order of places. The transfer of terms expressed in dominant languages (French, English, Spanish, Portuguese) to indigenous communities speaking other languages is a type of “discursive dominance”. It results in an “imperialism of meaning” (LAFONT, 1978) exercised by the generalization of Western linguistic praxis that have semantic, notional and practical effects on the target linguistic and cultural universes. I analyze these phenomena with Discourse analysis and



anthropological linguistics, more specifically praxématique, a linguistic approach developed in Montpellier around Robert Lafont.

**10 · M. S. A.** *In your opinion, what theoretical paths will characterize the French Discourse Analysis in the coming years? What will researchers tend to invest in? What will they manage to abandon?*

**F. D.** As mentioned above Discourse Analysis is now equipped with textual software in the framework of what is called Digital Humanities. Consequently, quantitative analysis based on textual data processing (corpus linguistics) tend to replace Discourse analysis, sometimes at the expense of qualitative analytical fineness. The efforts are focused on processing data and making them accessible by means of visualizations and graphs.

Discourse analysts now often talk of ‘discursive analysis’ instead of ‘discourse analysis’. This shift from discourse to discursive is significant in my view, as the word ‘discourse’ in the singular had a strong meaning in former French discourse analysis.

Bridges have also been established with sociolinguistics, interactionism, ethno-methodology, because Discourse analysis also analyze oral interactions, and sometimes the sociolinguists call themselves discourse analysts and vice versa.

I would say that French discourse analysis has lost its specificity as discourse analysis “à la française” due to transnational flows of knowledge and research, even if it still stays more linguistically focused than other approaches in the UK, the US or Germany.

